

By Lisa Daniel – American Forces Press Service
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WASHINGTON – Dozens of military family members took to the nation's capital today to educate lawmakers about their most pressing issues. [Video](#)

Those issues were revealed in the Blue Star Families' 2010 Military Family Lifestyle Survey, which the military family advocacy group unveiled in the Capitol Visitors Center to mark the start of the Joint Congressional and Senate Military Families Caucus Event.

"This is a great way for us to get our concerns out there, and it gets us to one central location," said Karen Francis, Blue Star Families member and an Army spouse and mother. "It's easier than putting calls into your Congress member, who may or may not serve on a committee that can help you."

Sen. Barbara Boxer of California and Sen. Richard Burr of North Carolina created the Senate caucus in August as a complement to the House military families caucus that Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers of Washington and Rep. Sanford Bishop of Georgia started in November. The lawmakers, all of whom attended the survey unveiling, said the caucuses are important to educate lawmakers about the concerns of military families.

"What a loud voice you are!" said Bishop, whose district includes Fort Benning. "The strength of our military is drawn from the strength of their families."

Spouses and parents, as well as some children and other family members, made up the 3,634 people who took the online survey in May. Their top concern was for pay and benefits – chosen by 21 percent of respondents this year, compared to 18 percent last year. The next-greatest concern was the toll a parent's deployment takes on children, with 15 percent choosing the category, compared to 12 percent last year.

Survey respondents chose operational tempo as their third area of concern, with 14 percent choosing the category compared to 16 percent last year.

The biggest differences between respondents' concerns this year and last was in children's education. Twelve percent of respondents this year called it a major concern, compared to 3 percent last year.

The fifth major area of concern was spousal employment, with 9 percent choosing the category, compared to 6 percent last year.

The survey further showed that more than half of families have increased stress during deployments, with one-third saying they have "much more" stress.

"Our servicemembers are stretched and stressed," Sheila Casey, a Blue Star Mother and wife of Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. "Yet, we're amazingly resilient. We're not victims, and we help each other."

Douglas B. Wilson, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, told the families about a new department program called, 'Me and a Friend,' which he created after speaking to children of a deployed servicemember. The program issues free tickets to sporting and cultural events for military children and their friends.

"It's a matter of looking into our community and understanding that maybe the next-door neighbor is overseas, but maybe the neighbor's child would like to go to an event," he said.

Burr, who represents one of the largest military communities that includes Fort Bragg, quoted Martin Luther King Jr., who said, "If you're not as concerned with your neighbor's child as you are with your own, you'll wake up one day and not recognize the community you live in."

The survey is the largest to date to gauge the concerns of military families, Blue Star Families

representatives said. However, the Defense Department also has commissioned a survey, the Military Family Life Project, to examine in real time the broad impact of deployments. It will be the first time the department has undertaken such an extensive study, a DOD military community and family policy analyst said.